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AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM FOR THE EDUCATION OF ENGLISH TEACHERS.

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AS PART OF THE FIVE COLLEGE PROJECT ON TEACHER EDUCATION, SPONSORED BY THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AND THE DANFORTH FOUNDATION, THE ENTIRE FACULTY OF THE STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK AT FREDONIA HAS COMPLETED DEVELOPMENT OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM FOR THE PREPARATION OF SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHERS. TESTING OF THE PROGRAM HAS BEGUN. ALTHOUGH THE STUDENT WILL BE REQUIRED TO TAKE A SEQUENCE OF COURSES IN GREEK, ROMAN, ENGLISH, AND AMERICAN LITERATURE, THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE, AND ADVANCED COMPOSITION, THE PROGRAM DIFFERS MOST RADICALLY FROM TRADITIONAL TRAINING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN "INDUCTION PERIOD." IN THE SUMMER BETWEEN A STUDENT'S JUNIOR AND SENIOR YEARS HE WILL ASSIST A SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHER FOR A PERIOD OF 6 WEEKS AND ATTEND WEEKLY CONFERENCES WITH THE COOPERATING TEACHER AND A PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH. DURING THE FOLLOWING SEMESTER, THE STUDENT WILL PRACTICE TEACH AT A NEARBY SCHOOL DURING THE MORNING AND RETURN TO THE COLLEGE CAMPUS TWO AFTERNOONS A WEEK FOR A SEMINAR ON THE METHODOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF TEACHING ENGLISH, INCLUDING THE DISCUSSION OF PROBLEMS ARISING FROM PRACTICE TEACHING. IN HIS FINAL SEMESTER, THE STUDENT WILL PARTICIPATE IN A SENIOR SEMINAR DESIGNED TO HELP HIM SYNTHESIZE HIS KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND COMPOSITION AND TO REFINE HIS SKILLS IN LITERARY CRITICISM. WHEN THE STUDENT HAS COMPLETED THE 4-YEAR PROGRAM, THE COLLEGE FACULTY, RATHER THAN A STATE AGENCY, WILL MAKE THE FINAL DECISION ON HIS ELIGIBILITY FOR A PROVISIONAL TEACHING CERTIFICATE. (THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "COLLEGE ENGLISH," VOL. 29, NO. 6, MARCH 1968.) SEE ALSO TE 000 284. (DL)

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TEACHING ENGLISH

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An Experimental Program for the Education of English Teachers

STUART WILSON

IN 1964 the State University College at Fredonia, New York, joined with Brooklyn College, Colgate University, Cornell University, and Vassar College, in a Five College Project on Teacher Education sponsored by the New York State Education Department and the Danforth Foundation. The Project was established to test James Conant's premise in *The Education of American Teachers* that if a college or university could involve its whole faculty in the development of teacher education programs, the result would be better programs and better teachers because the faculty, rather than a state agency, would assume the responsibility for certifying the competence of graduates. To this end the members of the Project were granted the right to develop programs without regard to exist-

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ing state certification requirements, and the Fredonia faculty has now completed development of an experimental program for the education of English teachers which takes full advantage of this grant of autonomy.[1]

The present New York State regulations for the certification of English teachers require study of "the body of knowledge which establishes the social, philosophical, and psychological foundations of educational theory and practice;" development of "the skills which include methods and materials of teaching . . . and supervised observation and practice teaching"; "at least 36 semester hours in English," which must include study of "adolescent literary materials, advanced writing, concepts, processes and media of communication, development, structure and function of the English language, improvement of reading, English, American, and world literature, oral composition," and "oral interpretation."[2] When these requirements are translated into courses composing a program leading to the A.B. degree and provisional certification, the program turns out to be a fragmented rather than a unified education for the prospective teacher of English. Although we firmly believe that the prospective teacher must have a thorough knowledge of his discipline before he can impart it to others, we find that the present program hinders more often than it helps the student toward eventual mastery of his subject. His first two years are occupied mainly by the general education requirements; the basic English courses help him toward a minimum proficiency in reading and writing and an introductory knowledge of literature. But he is hardly introduced to his discipline before being taken away from it during the third year by courses which are principally concerned with the practical aspects of teaching, and he is asked to learn about classroom methods and procedures before having had any actual experience in the public schools. Further interruption occurs in the fourth year when the student must leave the college for period of student teaching. As a consequence, he has only one semester for intensive, unalloyed study in his major area, and it is obvious that one semester is hardly enough for the development of the kind of intellectual maturity that the prospective teacher of English must possess.

The experimental program at Fredonia will eliminate many of the inadequacies of the present curriculum. At the outset it will provide a reasonably thorough grounding in the liberal arts and sciences by requiring courses in English composition, art, music, philosophy, modern foreign language, laboratory science, mathematics, history, social sciences, psychology, speech-drama, and physical education. The requirements in English begin with surveys of Greek and Roman, English, and American literature followed in the junior year by four courses in the historical periods of English and American literature (students must take two courses in the periods before 1700, and two after 1700). The history of the language and advanced writing will be studied in sequence. The senior year will include a course in Shakespeare, the courses designed to provide an induction into English teaching, two electives in English, and a senior seminar. The program provides a modest amount of choice in the area of free electives; the number will depend upon the student's secondary school preparation in such areas as modern foreign language.

Instead of a fragmented approach to the study of English, this program will

[1] For a complete description of the genesis and structure of this program as well as reports on their progress by other members of the Project, see *The Interim Report of the Five College Project* (Albany, N. Y., State Education Department, 1967).

[2] *Amendment to Regulations of the Commissioner of Education* (Albany, N. Y., State Education Department, 1964), pp. 2-3.

provide coherent form and purpose: structural unity is produced by the organization of the study of language, literature, and composition into a triad, which is consistent throughout the program; linear unity is provided by the organization of courses into a chronological sequence. Thus the student's study of Greek and Roman literature will be followed by concentration upon the literature of England and America; as a consequence, for the organization of his knowledge he will have the invaluable assistance of an evolving historical framework. Such an arrangement should not be understood to imply an excessive emphasis on literary history; on the contrary it provides a matrix within which the principles of formal criticism can be effectively learned and applied. And if the stress on literature seems remote from public school teaching, it should be realized that the study of literature as a discipline provides the intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural values inherent in the art form as well as a continuous emphasis on language and composition. Since literature is a verbal art, a thorough understanding of any particular work, whether it is a sonnet by Shakespeare or a novel by Hemingway, requires that the student possess refined and disciplined critical perceptions, special knowledge of the nature and evolution of the language, and the ability to articulate his responses either orally or in writing. Thus the study of literature not only imparts knowledge of one of the most important expressions of human ideals, character, and values, but also fosters the practical skills which the successful teacher of English must possess.

An emphasis on the practical aspects of teaching is an integral part of Fredonia's experimental program. A sequence of courses in the junior year will concentrate upon the development of versatility in the use of language: a course defining the nature and structure of Modern English in light of its historical development will be followed by a study of advanced composition in which the student will apply his understanding of the language by perfecting his ability to write expository prose. During the summer following his junior year, the student will begin what we have called the Induction Period, a phrase borrowed from Dr. Conant that describes well the sequence of experiences which will provide the essential orientation for a career in teaching. Since this part of the program is the most radical departure from current practice, it should be described in some detail.

The design of the Induction Period will permit the student to proceed from a general introduction to the nature and scope of secondary school education to a specific concentration upon the teaching of English. During the first phase, the Summer Assistantship, the student will serve for six weeks as an assistant to an English teacher in a secondary school near the college. He will observe all the aspects of teaching and classroom administration, and he will gain experience in the organization and planning of course work, the grading of written compositions, and the techniques of pedagogy especially suited to English as a discipline. If the cooperating teacher is agreeable, the student will be able to plan and teach his own lessons. To complement his work in the school, he will complete a series of readings in the history and philosophy of education and in the teaching of English. The readings together with classroom experiences will be the subject of weekly conferences with the cooperating teacher and a professor in the college's Department of English who specializes in English Education. Since the student will not be practice teaching but will be working as an assistant to a summer session teacher, he will be provided a stipend of $600.00 drawn from the funds available for the support of the experiment, and the cooperating teacher will be paid $150.00

for his assistance to the program. We believe that the experience in a secondary school summer session will be especially valuable to a prospective teacher of English not only because it will provide familiarity with the operation of a school, but also because the range and variety of teaching common in such a session will give the student a view of his career in microcosm. English teaching during the summer ranges from remedial labors with the slowest students to advanced studies with the exceptionally bright. Such experience should help the student verify his choice of vocation as nothing else could.

The second phase of the Induction Period will occur during the first semester of the senior year, immediately following the Summer Assistantship. Having completed a sequentially organized program in the liberal arts for six semesters and the period of orientation provided by the work in a summer session, the student should be especially well prepared for student teaching. The students in the experimental group will be assigned to secondary schools in the vicinity of the college and will student teach during the mornings throughout the semester. They will work under the supervision of the specialist in English Education and of the cooperating teacher in the school. Under the cooperating teacher program which is a part of the experimental project, many of the teachers will have spent a semester on the college campus prior to the time they assume their roles as cooperating teachers. During this semester, they will teach basic courses, visit other classrooms, confer with the English staff, and in general familiarize themselves with the nature and purpose of the present and the experimental programs. After this kind of experience, they should be well fitted to assist in the supervision of the student teachers.

During two afternoons of each week, the student teachers will return to the college campus for a Seminar in the Teaching of English which will be organized and administered by the Department's specialists in English Education and taught by them in cooperation with an educational psychologist and various consultants representing other areas of importance to English teachers. The subject matter of the seminar will include the organization and administration of secondary school English courses, the methods and materials for teaching language, literature, and composition, a survey of the reading materials available for young people, the nature and function of various tests and measurements, procedures for maintaining discipline, and a synopsis of educational philosophy and psychology. Teachers and students involved in the seminar will test the feasibility of integrating the psychology of learning with the teaching of English. But in any case, traditional subject matter will not predominate in the seminar: one great advantage of scheduling the seminar concurrent with student teaching is that it will provide a forum for the discussion and resolution of problems as they arise. Since the students will be involved in the task of managing classes, this inductive approach to the methods of teaching should be especially illuminating for them, and the subject matter of the seminar should become more relevant and meaningful. Such an arrangement should close the gap between theory and practice which seems to diminish the effectiveness of the present program.

The specific preparations for teaching will culminate in the eighth semester (the second of the senior year) in the Senior Seminar, which will be conducted by a member of the English Department. The seminar will be organized so as to provide the student with a means of synthesizing his knowledge of language, literature, and composition, and for refining his skills in literary criticism. While the seminar will be oriented to-

ward providing a synoptic view of literature, it will include consideration of those aspects of the discipline which are particularly appropriate to the teaching of English in secondary schools.

When the student has completed the four-year program, the faculty of the State University College at Fredonia will make the final decision on his eligibility for the Bachelor of Arts degree and provisional certification to teach English in the secondary schools of New York State. A unique feature of the experimental program is the shift of responsibility for certification from the state to the college faculty. By its actions in the development of the program, the faculty demonstrated its willingness to become more intimately involved in teacher education and to assume the responsibility for insuring the competence of prospective English teachers. As a consequence, Dr. Conant attested to the State Education Department that the procedures we used satisfied his definition of the all-college process for the development of programs, and the Department agreed to grant its standard provisional certificate to students who complete the experimental program to the satisfaction of the college faculty.

The faculty gave its final approval to the experimental program in the fall of 1966, and it was immediately implemented by the transfer from the conventional program for English teachers of sixteen students who were selected according to criteria established by the All-College Committee on Teacher Education. In the interest of a valid procedure for evaluating the experimental programs it sponsors, the Committee had agreed on two principles: (1) the strengths or weaknesses of a particular curriculum have little effect upon the performance of intellectually superior students, and (2) a teacher education program must be concerned with quantity as well as quality and the number of superior students is always small. For these reasons among others, the Committee decided that while the enrollment in an experimental program might have to be limited, the students admitted must represent a full range of academic ability, excepting, of course, those whose potential for success in college is nil. In the spring of 1966, there were thirty-two students in the existing program for secondary school English teachers who had demonstrated their ability to successfully complete an undergraduate education. Twenty-one members of this group responded to the invitation to apply for admission to the experimental program. To satisfy the Committee's desire for a normal population and to establish suitable controls for the experiment, sixteen students representing a cross section of academic ability were accepted for admission into the experimental program. The other sixteen, also representing a full range of ability, will remain in the existing curriculum and serve as a control group for purposes of evaluation.

The careful selection of students is of course only the first step in the total process of evaluation, and the Committee is well aware that it must find and if necessary develop suitable instruments for measuring the results of the experimentation. The task is rendered especially difficult by the lack of any generally accepted definition of good teaching. A survey of recent studies shows that good teaching remains very difficult to measure by statistical methods,[3] and that while some advances have been made in the establishment of reliable criteria, evaluation of teaching ability remains largely subjective and often dependent upon ephemeral or irrelevant considerations.[4]

[3]See, for example, G. W. Durlinger, "Personality Correlates of Success in Student-Teaching," *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, XXIII (1963), pp. 383-90, and G. L. Newsome et al, "Changes in Consistency of Educational Ideas Attributable to Student-Teaching Experiences," *Journal of Teacher Education*, XVI (1965), pp. 319-23.

[4]Cf. F. G. Rhodes and D. R. Peckham,

Under these circumstances, the Committee is inclined to agree with Dr. Conant who believes that until more reliable methods for determining teaching quality are discovered, the success of a program and of the teachers it produces can best be determined according to three criteria:

(1) The number of students who enter the new program compared to those who choose to remain in the existing program.

(2) A comparison of the number of students who complete each program successfully.

(3) A comparison of the length of time that students from two programs remain in teaching.

An evaluation based upon these criteria will require careful attention to record keeping and tabulation, a process which the Department of English has already begun by assembling pertinent data on the abilities and interests of the thirty-two students in the experimental group, by keeping detailed records of their academic performance, and by developing methods for evaluating the teaching performance of the students after they leave the college.

These three criteria will serve as the matrix of the evaluation process for Fredonia's experimental English program. As other criteria for judging good teaching are discovered to be valid and pertinent, they will be incorporated into the total process. To complement the evaluation of the program as a whole, the scholarly competence and potential for teaching of individual students will be judged in the following ways:

1. *Academic standing.* The student's academic ability will be amply demonstrated by his successful completion of course work in the major area, by his performance in the courses offered by other disciplines, and by the ability to communicate which he demonstrates in courses and in student teaching. Throughout his undergraduate career, the student's performance will be carefully evaluated by his major advisor and the English staff. A thorough understanding of language, literature, and composition is essential, and the student will be required to demonstrate exceptional skills in reading, writing, and speaking. As a further guarantee of competence, the Department of English is now considering the inauguration of a senior comprehensive examination.
2. *Advisement.* The Department has undertaken to strengthen the ties between students and academic advisors so that students can gain better understanding of their present and future roles, and faculty members will be in a better position to judge their potential for success in teaching.
3. *Preliminary evaluation.* During the second semester of each academic year, the Department will review the evaluative materials for each student accumulated to that point. Those students found deficient will be counseled out of the program. At the end of the junior year, a final decision will be made as to the student's eligibility to undertake the summer assistantship and student teaching.
4. *Summer assistantship.* During the summer high school experience which will normally follow the student's junior year, the cooperating teacher and the college supervisor will be evaluating the student's potential as a classroom teacher. The student will present his own report of the experience in writing to the college supervisor.
5. *Student teaching.* The cooperating teacher in the secondary school, the college supervisors, and the members of the instructional team for the Seminar in Teaching will all be involved

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"Evaluative Reports on Student Teachers," *Journal of Teacher Education*, XI (1960), pp. 520-23, and *Evaluating Student Teaching: Thirty-Ninth Yearbook of the Association for Student Teaching*, ed. A. C. Moon (Cedar Falls, Iowa, 1960), passim.

in the final determination of the student's fitness for teaching.

The first group of students to enter the experimental program at Fredonia will perform the Summer Assistantship in 1968 and will graduate in 1969. Since the All-College Committee has agreed to continue the program as long as there are funds to support it, a second group of freshmen were admitted in the fall of 1967. They entered a program that differs somewhat from the one outlined above because the grant of autonomy and the freedom to experiment mean that we can explore alternative routes toward the same goal. We cannot pretend to have solved the problem of educating English teachers, but we are confident that the new program is better than the old, and that by gradual change we can improve it further.

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